

## John 14. 23-29 Rogation Sunday CC & St J 22.5.2022

Today is 'Rogation Sunday'. Well actually it isn't, because in the Common Worship calendar, there is no Rogation Sunday as such. Yes, there are the ancient Rogation Days, tomorrow and Tuesday and Wednesday, leading up to Ascension Day, but strictly speaking not today.

The reasoning why we don't have Rogation Sunday is to protect the integrity of the Easter Season, the seven Sundays of Easter before Pentecost. The Rogation Days are days when we pray for God's blessing on the land, on agriculture and fisheries, on human labour and work. They are days when we remember our God-given responsibility to care for the earth and its creatures and to steward well and justly its resources. But, if you look at the Lectionary readings set for today, none of them reflects rogation themes and neither does the Collect. But, we're going to do it anyway!

And, unapologetically so! And I say that because there's a tendency to squeeze out creation in the Church's calendar in favour of redemption. Yes, historically the Rogation Days are weekdays, but most Christians gather for worship on Sunday.

And creation and redemption are not two separate ideas, for a Christian doctrine of redemption includes the redemption of all that is, of the whole of creation. And the Rogation Days historically have been linked to the Ascension, which celebrates redemption.

Rogation days, as the name implies are 'asking days', days of intercession, from the Latin, rogo, meaning "I ask".

And a central doctrine of the Ascension is that the eternal ministry of our Ascended Lord is a ministry of intercession.

Jesus prays continuously at the right hand of the Father;

He pleads His saving passion, He prays, as we pray, for the world

He has redeemed and for its renewal.

And when we ask, we pray 'through Him', 'through Jesus Christ our Lord', He unites our prayers with His eternal intercession and perfects our prayers, for everything Jesus offers to the Father is perfect.

It seems that rogation is pre-Christian and originated from a procession arounds the fields in which the Graeco-Roman god Robigus was petitioned to preserve the crops from mildew. The Church adopted this tradition from the 5th century, moving it to the weekdays before Ascension Day and using processional litanies for God's blessing on the land, culminating with mass in Church. The Reformation at first swept such observance aside but it was restored in 1559. Famously, George Herbert wrote in his work *The Country Parson*, 'Particularly, he loves Procession'. For Herbert, the Rogation Procession, 'beating the bounds' of the parish, was to ask for God's blessing on the land, to preserve boundaries, to encourage fellowship and the setting aside of disputes, and in charitable giving to the poor.

So we have, as it were, today to beat the bounds of Christ Church / St James, circling it and somehow enveloping it and us in prayer. But there is another link. Today's Gospel takes us back to the Upper Room on the night of Jesus' Passion.

As He prepared to accept death, Jesus anticipates that the parting of death is a pre-cursor of another type of departure.

In John, Jesus' death is His glorification; the cross is His 'lifting up', to be nailed on a cross and then lifted from the earth is the sign of His exaltation as universal Lord.

That lifting up was then fulfilled by what, in John, is a single sequence of resurrection and ascension. The word in today's Gospel, 'I am going away' are Christ's words to us.

But He is not 'going away' in the sense of abandonment; for now that the Spirit-filled Saviour is exalted, that same Spirit is released to fill the hearts of Jesus' people.

What Jesus is saying to His disciples in today's Gospel is:

If only you knew what my going to the Father means – you would rejoice. As they did indeed rejoice at Pentecost.

Jesus' resurrection is a work of the Trinity.

The Father raises the crucified, dead and buried body of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And that is why we understand the Holy Spirit to be the basis of all renewal. The Spirit gives life to what is dead.

As St Paul reminded the Romans,

“If the Spirit of him who raised the Lord Jesus dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies – your dead bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”

And what is true for us is also true for creation.

For salvation in the Christian tradition is for everything– a renewed humanity and a renewed creation.

The annual cycles of nature, the care of the soil to make it fruitful, land reclamation, the purifying of the air; the care and conservation of the waters, all point to this principle of renewal.

The reception of grace, forgiveness, new hope in our lives – all the things worship is about – points to this principle of renewal.

The sacraments, whereby created things become through prayer and blessing vehicles of grace – bread, wine, water, oil, ash, touch – point to this principle of renewal.

Brilliant initiatives like the Food-bank, good health care, creative education, social housing, community regeneration, all point to this principle of renewal.

And I say this because I believe everything that is life-giving, good, true, and renewing is the work of God through the transformative Spirit. Just as every area of life is worthy of our prayers.

So yes, today we have been a bit naughty, but unapologetically so, because the 'Church calendar is made for human beings, not human beings for the calendar!'

And of course, as we move from life-giving word to life-giving sacrament, we experience renewal, as bread and wine are taken and blessed, as God's Holy Spirit is invoked on them so that they convey all the depths of Christ's passion, all the reality of His exaltation and then we eat and drink His body and His blood, full of Holy Spirit, full of life, full of grace, and the same Spirit once again raises us from the dead to be Jesus' living people.

We know that whatever we place into the Lord's hands, the Lord takes, blesses and multiplies.

May God give to our hearts and minds and imaginations today the capacity for transformation.

Ask Him, 'rogo', and He will do it.

Amen